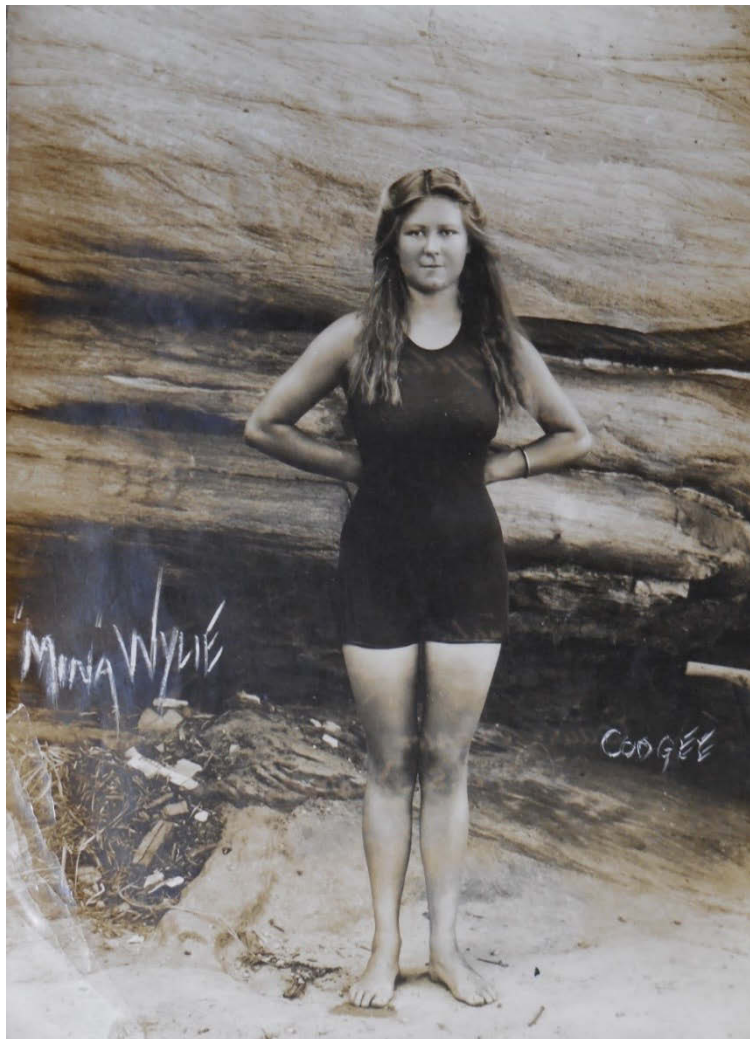


# **In Search of Mina Wylie**

Thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy,  
University of Technology Sydney.

February 19th 2018

**Grace Mary BARNES**



*Figure 1: Mina Wylie at Coogee, 1913.*

## **CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I certify that this has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of student: .....

Date: .....

This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

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Unless otherwise stated, the photographs or items listed are held in the following collections at the Mitchell Library in Sydney:

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MLMSS 9977 - ‘Mina Wylie Papers, ca.1912- ca.1939.

PXE 1028 – ‘Mina Wylie, her family, swimming colleagues and friends – travelling, holidays and swimming competitions, photographed from ca. 1883–1930s’

PXA 1323 – ‘Photographs of Mina Wylie ca. 1896–1975’

R 956 – ‘Swimming medals of Mina Wylie and Henry Wylie, 1894–1978’

Q 85 & Q 86 - ‘Collection of photographs relating to the 1912 Olympic games, Stockholm, from the E.S. Marks Sporting Collection.’

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the life and sporting career of 1912 Olympic swimmer Mina Wylie, who, as a figure, embodied the enormous societal changes with regard to the place of women, brought about by the advent of modernity. It combines a study of Wylie's life, drawing on the available archival materials, with a shorter creative component inspired by an underlying set of issues concerning competitive swimming, gender, families and memory. Despite being one of the greatest swimmers Australia has ever produced, Wylie is little known today and her place in Australian sporting history is a precarious one. The critical analysis that forms the first part of the thesis is driven by four main questions: 1. Why is Mina Wylie not better known in contemporary culture? 2. Why has Mina Wylie been subject to various processes of forgetting and remembering? 3. What issues concerning women and sport in Australia does Wylie's career illuminate? 4. What does Wylie's career tell us about sports history and memory? The resulting inquiry is contextualised within current feminist debates concerning gender and sport and within the shifting discourses of Australian national identity. It explores the challenge that early women swimmers posed to the prevailing ideals of femininity and also investigates how women athletes, such as Wylie, could be understood at a time when the developing discourse of Australia as the 'Sporting Nation' was so strongly aligned with the ideals of masculinity. The research also reveals how Wylie's life story is marked by instances of forgetting and misremembering. This pattern is analysed in order to illuminate how Wylie was refashioned at different moments to symbolise egalitarianism, modernity, chauvinism, the feminist movement, the 'Aussie Battler', the fresh-faced and outdoors-loving 'Australian Girl' and the forgotten champion. This engagement with the life of Mina Wylie and the world of competitive swimming prompted me to reflect on the relationship between my mother and me, forged through our shared passion for swimming. This is taken up in the creative component of the thesis, in the form of a memoir centred on this bond, which was established through swimming.

*The search is for all the ideas, and times, and images that will give us now, solidarity and meaning in time, and they are as various as a great queen's passing, a story of gender relations in a household of the 1840s, or faces illuminated by the gas flares at a union meeting and the travails of all the last century's child labourers. It seems that we do this quite obdurately, in the face of the hard and clear advice from psychoanalysis, which tell us that the quest is impossible, that what we are searching for is for a lost object, which really cannot be found. The object (the event, the happening, the story from the past) has been altered by the very search for it, and by the time in which the searching is done: what has actually been lost can never be found. That is not to say that nothing is found, but that thing is always something else, a creation of the search and the duration of the search.*

**Carolyn Steedman (1998, pp. 73-74)**